

Heart Health and Stroke

Hear disease is the #1 killer of women. It doesn't matter how young or old you are. Whatever your age, you need to take action to protect your heart.

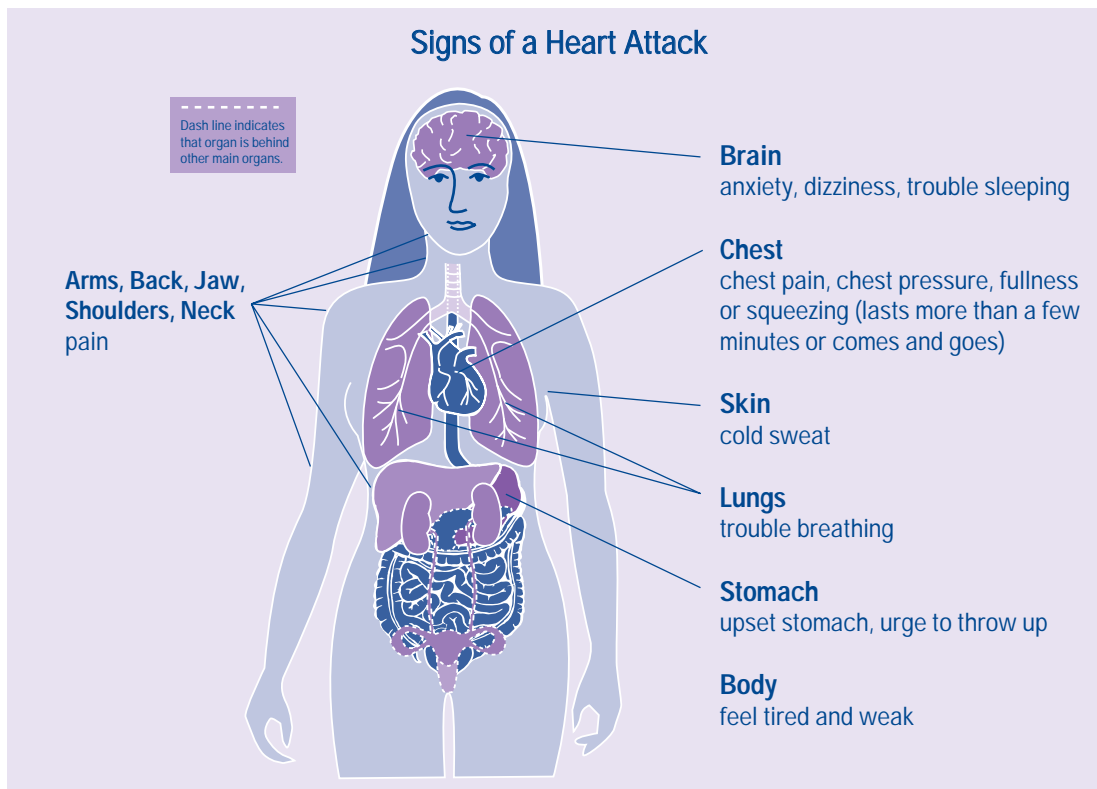
The Basics of Heart Disease

There are different kinds of heart disease. Most people get coronary artery disease (CAD). You can get this when your heart doesn't get enough blood. If your heart

doesn't get enough blood, you can have a heart attack.

Know the Signs of a Heart Attack

There are differences in how women and men respond to a heart attack. Women are less likely than men to believe they're having a heart attack and more likely to delay in seeking treatment.



But for women, chest pain may not be the first sign your heart is in trouble. Before a heart attack, women have said that they have unusual tiredness, trouble sleeping, problems breathing, indigestion, and anxiety. These symptoms can happen a month or so before the heart attack. During a heart attack, women often have these symptoms.

- Pain or discomfort in the center of the chest.
- Pain or discomfort in other areas of the

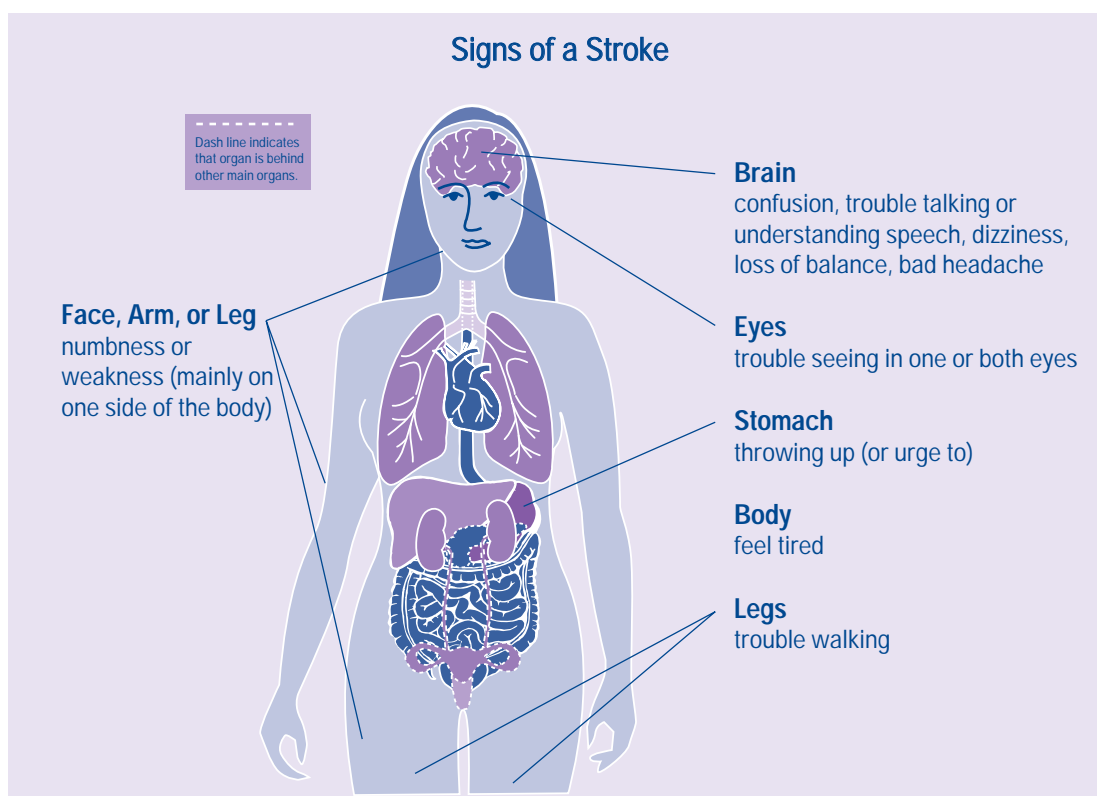
upper body, including the arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach.

- Other symptoms, such as shortness of breath, breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness.

The Basics of Stroke

A stroke occurs when part of the brain doesn't get the blood it needs. Then, brain cells die. There are two types of stroke.

- An ischemic (iss-kee-mik) stroke happens when blood is blocked from getting to the brain.





Get help right away

If you have signs of a heart attack or stroke, call 911. Call right away—in 5 minutes or less.

- A hemorrhagic (heh-muh-ra-jik) stroke happens when a blood vessel in the brain bursts, and blood bleeds into the brain.

A person might also have a “mini-stroke.” This happens when, for a short time, less blood than normal gets to the brain. You may have some signs of a full stroke, or you may not notice any signs at all. But it only lasts a few minutes up to 24 hours. Then you’re back to normal. Many people don’t even know they’ve had it. However, a “mini-stroke” is a sign of a full stroke to come, so it’s important to know the signs of a stroke.

Know the Signs of a Stroke

The signs of a stroke happen suddenly and are different from the signs of a heart attack. Signs you should look for are weakness or numbness on one side of your body, dizziness, loss of balance, confusion, trouble talking or understanding speech, headache, nausea, or trouble walking or seeing. Remember: Even if you have a “mini-stroke,” you may have some of these signs.

Take These Steps to Have a Healthy Heart

Here are some things you can do to keep your heart healthy. Ask your doctor or nurse to help you take these steps.

- **Don’t smoke.** It’s no surprise that smoking hurts your heart. So if you smoke, try to quit.
- **Get your cholesterol tested.** If it’s high (above 200), talk to your doctor or nurse about losing weight (if you’re overweight) and getting more active. Ask if there’s medicine that may help. *Look at the chart on page 16 to find out when you should be tested.*



- **Know your blood pressure.** Your heart moves blood through your body. If it's hard for your heart to do this, your heart works harder, and your blood pressure will rise. Have it checked to make sure you're on track! If it is high, talk to your doctor or nurse about how to lower it. *Look at the chart on page 16 to find out when you should be tested.*
- **Get tested for diabetes.** Diabetes can raise your chances of getting heart disease. If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar levels in check! This is the BEST way for you to take care of yourself and your heart. *Look at the chart on page 16 to find out when you should be tested.*



- **Eat heart-healthy foods.** Eat whole-grain foods, vegetables, and fruits. Choose lean meats and low-fat cheese and dairy products. Limit foods that have lots of saturated fat, like butter, whole milk, baked goods, ice cream, fatty meats, and cheese.
 - **Keep a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese raises your risk for heart disease.
 - **Eat less salt.** Choose foods with less salt. Use spices, herbs, lemon, and lime instead of salt. This is really important if you have high blood pressure.
 - **If you drink alcohol, don't have more than one drink per day.** Too much alcohol raises blood pressure and can raise your risk for stroke and other problems.
- Get moving!** Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days, if not all days, of the week.



- **Take your medicine.** If your doctor has prescribed medicine to lower your blood pressure or cholesterol, take it exactly as you have been told to.
- **Take steps to treat your sleep problems.** If you snore loudly, have been told you stop breathing at times when you sleep, and are very sleepy during the day, you may have sleep apnea. If you don't treat it, it raises your chances of having a heart attack or stroke. Talk with your doctor or nurse about treating this problem.
- **Find healthy ways to cope with stress.** Sometimes, people cope with stress by eating, drinking too much alcohol, or smoking—these are all ways that could hurt your heart. Lower your stress: talk to friends, be physically active, meditate, and try not to take on more than you can handle.



Physical Activity Is for All Ages

When you hear “physical activity,” do you think of exercise? Exercise is just one type of physical activity. There are so many things you can do to be active—at any age. But remember: check with your doctor or nurse first before starting vigorous activities. Here are some ways to get moving:

- walking
- swimming
- biking
- water aerobics
- playing with children
- housework
- running
- gardening
- dancing
- hiking
- climbing steps



- carrying laundry or groceries
- working in the yard
- washing the car
- yoga
- tai chi
- lifting weights or cans
- walking the dog



The Red Dress Is a Red Alert

The Red Dress is the national symbol for women and heart disease awareness. The symbol, introduced by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute as the centerpiece of *The Heart Truth* campaign, serves as a red alert for women. Heart disease doesn't care what you wear—it's the #1 killer of women. Visit www.hearttruth.gov to learn more about *The Heart Truth* and get your Red Dress pin.



Then and Now

We used to think of heart disease as a man's problem. Now, we know it is the #1 killer of women.

Balerma's Story



Balerma, 52

So many of my female relatives had diabetes when I was growing up that I didn't know how dangerous it is. My wake-up call came when my mother had a massive

heart attack at a young age. I looked around and realized how many of my female relatives with diabetes died of heart problems. Diabetes is high among American Indians, but my sisters and I just weren't taught about what could happen if we had it, or that it could be prevented.

I found out I had diabetes three years ago. This was only six months after my mother died from a second heart attack. A lot of Comanche women don't talk about their health, but I'm trying to be open with my kids about diabetes. I teach them how to eat better and get more exercise. I tell them they're doing these things for me, but more importantly for their own health and their own kids' lives as well. I know that if I don't change things in my life, I might not live to see my grandchildren. Every day, I talk myself into doing things for my health, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator and eating more fruits and vegetables. These things haven't become habits for me yet, but I'm working on it.

From *Stories from the Heart, The Heart Truth Campaign*, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.